

A Comparative Analysis of the Translation of the Causative Object between Arabic and English

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Abstract

Background: Causative constructions represent a cross-linguistic grammatical category of agent versus affected. This means that the Arabic-to-English translation of causatives is challenged by both grammatical equivalence and semantic equivalence (Kemmer & Verhagen, 1994; Zemni et al., 2024). **Aims:** This study investigates the translational tendencies of the causative object, the patient experiencing/agent enacting a caused action, across Arabic and English, including the resultant lexical changes, translational tendencies, and contextual driving forces of explicitness. It also examines the importance of voice and semantics across discourse levels and translational direction. **Methods:** The present study was based on an annotated corpus of 2000 Arabic–English parallel sentences. Descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and qualitative examples were used to evaluate translation tendencies in structure and meaning. **Results:** The findings indicate that causatives were most successfully translated from Arabic to English when using explicative periphrastic causatives (make/get), whereas causatives were most successfully translated from English to Arabic when relying on nominalization and templatic templates. Causative representation is more prominent in the foreground or background, depending on voice shifting, explicitation, and implicitation. **Implications:** Understanding of causative-object translation supports translator training, bilingual dictionary creation, and MT systems by means of functional awareness, stylistic consistency, and interlingual facilitation of causative meta-structures.

Keywords: Causative object; Arabic–English translation; voice shift; nominalization; cross-linguistic equivalence

Introduction

Causation is one of the most primary relations that humankind can possess and expresses through language, with one event/entity causing another. Causative meaning across the globe is gestured through various grammatical/lexical means, and translated information sometimes reveals how speakers perceive and embody agency, control, and responsibility (Garman & Hudson, 1993; Kaye & Holes, 1997; Kortmann et al., 1995). Two languages with extensive causation one typological and one morphological are English and Arabic. In translation, the differences between causative constructions transform meaning, point of view or stylistics (Luqman & Mahmoud, 2018; Zemni et al., 2024). This paper uses the causative object—the entity caused or compelled as its focus in comparing Arabic to English. Relying on a comparative corpus of causative instances in both English and Arabic, this paper makes apparent systematic patterns, shifts and strategies which transform relative agency within the two languages in question by focusing on causatives

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(Abdel Fattah, 2018; Glanville, 2018).

There are two major types of phenomena that convey causative meaning in English: periphrastic causatives and lexical causatives. For example, periphrastic causatives operate with auxiliary verbs make, let, have or get in constructs where these causative forms operate with an open class bare infinitive or past participle (i.e., she made him leave; he got the car fixed). Causative meaning is understood literally and transparently constructs the causer and the causee, the new status/behavior of the caused agent/object (Abilkazievich & Urazbaevna, 2023; Levshina, 2016a). Conversely, "lexical causatives" are causations housed within one lexical item. For example, one might say, "The wind broke the window" or "He opened the door." Causal predicates in English are "cause," "enable," "allow" and "force." Causal constructions operate with causal predicates in a more formalized or abstract means of causation. Where the causee/affected participant tends to fall into the direct object position of a sentence after causal constructions, this may differ in strength and sense of agency as constructs possess more open syntactic patterns (Glanville, 2018; Levshina, 2016b).

Causation in Arabic relies on a different set of resources because of its "derivational morphology" and means of syntax. Causatives in Arabic are based upon "verb forms" while for the language "Form II (فعل)" and "Form IV (أفعل)" create causative verbs from the original triliteral roots. For example, the root "علم" ('-l-m, 'to know') results in the causative form "عَلَّمَ" ('allama, 'to teach' or, more literally, 'to cause to know'). Thus, a similar pervasiveness of causativization exists via its morphology in Arabic with a transparent relationship between the root meaning and the causative used. Moreover, in addition to the morphological creation of causatives, they exist via creation of causatives in use with "periphrastic causatives" with such verbs as "جعل (ja'ala)", "سَبَّب (sabbaba)" and "أَدَّى (addā ilā)" as they are used in various registers to describe causation. (Abu-Rabia & Awwad, 2004; Berman, 1993; Glanville, 2018). The most frequently occurring causative (المفعول به) takes place as a direct object or as the subject of an embedded verb clause, i.e. جعله يكتب. Thus, the causative of the most formal Arabic usages occur through nominalized causatives such as تسبَّب في that infiltrate more of educated, bureaucratic and media discourse. (Abu-Rabia & Awwad, 2004; Saiegh-Haddad, 2017; Watson, 2006).

The greatest issue in translation between Arabic and English is "structural asymmetry". One depends upon a syntactic construction and the other tends to create causative meaning morphology. (Aoun et al., 2009; Zemni et al., 2024). Consequently, the "causative object" is more translatable when it shifts syntactic location/grammatical function from one language to another. For example, an Arabic Form II causative can either be an English periphrastic causative ("make" + bare verb) or lexical equivalent ("teach," "raise," "strengthen"), whereas an English causative is translated into Arabic via templatic causatives (Form II/IV) or nominalized forms. These findings have implications for grammatical orientation, discourse register, style and agency (Habash, 2007; Jacques, 2022).

This study is comparative based on how these linguistic discrepancies are approached by translation with focus on the "causative object" since it is the causative object that is the most divergently translated, and it acts as a substantial provider of equivalent meaning. Therefore, this study notes how causative use is translated into or out of existence upon the object in order to draw

conclusions on macro linguistic trends. For example, with regard to the causee, researchers note that Arabic-English translators tend to “explicate” the causee for grammatical preservation, whereas in English-Arabic translations, nominalization is preferred based upon stylistic tendencies.

Furthermore, this paper seeks to assess acknowledgment tendencies, frequency, and fields of translation shift relative to the causative object over a composite of Arabic-English translations. Based on a corpus of 2000 parallel sentence derivations from news commentary, parliamentary discourse and subtitles, cumulative results prove that structural equivalence and voice shifts predominate, along with explicitation or implicitation strategies to substitute or nominalize the causee. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses of shifts show transformation relates to referentiality and cause the overarching condition of each simultaneous.

In summary, attempt to contribute to bilingual lexicons and source books, quality evaluation translations and materials for translational educators dealing with practical applications, as those translational practitioners must render problems of equivalence to causative structure between Arabic and English to attempt to bridge the gap. Ultimately, the causative object translation renders such possibilities. Theoretical implications suggest that a relatively accessible concept based upon its commonalities becomes overly complicated under findings that attempt to reveal where functional and structural equivalence exists, which misguided frequent transformations do not yield clear answers. However, practitioner and computational relevance render necessary systems to offer realistic application in translational professional settings, or automated systems. A more nuanced model of equivalence exists between the two languages for stylistic clarity and grammatical integrity.

Literature Review

The study of causative constructions in Arabic-English translation stems from linguistic typology, the syntax–semantics interface and translation studies. Much research exists relative to how languages encode causation and how translators face non-corresponding structures requiring meaning compensation. Extensive inquiry existed into how, early on, linguistic typology either recognized causation (or causative constructions) causatively/casually morphology or periphrastically. Essentially, causation (or causative constructions) is a universal semiotic category accounted for via morphology or periphrastic means an acknowledgment of the means of causation morphological or periphrastic and how the participants in causation the causer, the causee and the patient based on direct/indirect, intended/unintended nature (Glanville, 2018; Kemmer & Verhagen, 1994). Within the Arabic context, the causative derivational processes have been attested since ancient times by traditional Arab grammarians and modern researchers the productivity of *أفعل* and *فعل* as a result of transitivity increase. (Glanville, 2018; Kemmer & Verhagen, 1994; Saiegh-Haddad, 2017). More recent studies compare and contrast the Arabic morphological causative with the English causative and find that where the Arabic causative is morphologically rich, maintaining syntactic transparency of cause and effect, the English causative is lexically compact/analytically periphrastic. Thus, Arabic morphological richness allows more freedom of argument realization for Arabic speakers in how they can present a causee while English relies more on syntactic difference and auxiliary constructions. (Levshina, 2016b; *The*

Grammar of Causation and Interpersonal Manipulation, 2002).

Translation studies have made shift theory and equivalence models an understanding of how linguistic differences impact translation decisions. First, established shifts are movement away from formal correspondence where category and structure shifts are types of shift very much aligned with causative translation (Abilkazievich & Urazbaevna, 2023; Zemni et al., 2024). In Arabic–English translation, such patterns occur regarding the causee as Arabic's translators nominalize (تَسْبِبُ فِي) or create passives to imply indirect causation versus English translation's make, get, have (active periphrastic causatives) for overt meanings, clarity, and naturalness. Investigations into semantic roles/argument alignment find that translational shifts concerning the causee is another common factor resulting from differences that reveal deep typological differences: where Arabic relies on a primarily implicit context and backgrounding causees through its morphological nature versus an English emphasis on an explicit context, foregrounding causees due to its syntactical nature (Levshina, 2016b; *The Grammar of Causation and Interpersonal Manipulation*, 2002).

Recent computational and corpus-driven studies extend this discussion into applied domains. Investigated how Arabic morphological causatives challenge machine translation systems, which often misassign thematic roles or overuse lexical causatives like *cause*. Such findings underscore the need for linguistically informed annotation and post-editing strategies (Jarrar et al., 2016; Östling & Kurfalı, 2023). Moreover, Studies in translation research that translators frequently confuse patient and causee roles in Arabic to English and English to Arabic, substantiating the lack of pedagogical syntactic knowledge in the subject (Saiegh-Haddad & Geva, 2007). Collectively, these results in the literature indicate an integrative linguistic, translational and computational perspective: causative translation is not merely a structural adjustment but an engagement of the two systems of who does what, to whom and in response. Where this research extends these results is with a systematic, comparative, corpus-based study of causative objects that have been explored both in numbers and qualitatively on a more descriptive scale to prove how translators more or less interact with such phenomena according to argument orientation in various texts and translation directions (Doron, 2003; Kemmer & Verhagen, 1994; Washio, 1993).

Method

The study is conducted through a corpus-based comparative analysis of how the causative object is translated between Arabic and English. This design endeavors to consider statistical and qualitative forms of translational behavior by assessing the relative levels of formal, lexical, and pragmatic impact on the causative object or impacted party. Therefore, the study will utilize 2000 aligned sentence pairs gathered from pre-existing bilingual corpora and translational databases on the internet, namely, the United Nations Parallel Corpus and OpenSubtitles, as well as selected news articles between Arabic–English news agencies. The corpus was balanced between three registers: journalistic, parliamentary, and audiovisual to ensure a balance between more formalized and informal registers. Therefore, the inclusion criteria used require that each aligned sentence pair has at least one causative construction lexical, periphrastic, or morphological in either language. Idiomatic or figurative causation was deemed out of the scope of the analysis to ensure findings for future comparative endeavors.

Each causative construction will be manually annotated according to linguistic and

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translational features pertinent to the goals of this analysis. The categories for annotation will include: (1) type of causative (periphrastic, lexical, morphological, nominalized), (2) realization of the causative object (overt noun phrase, pronoun, clausal subject or null), (3) voice (active, passive or middle), (4) translational method (structural equivalence and maintenance, voice shift, explicitation/implication/reduction, lexical substitution/nominalization), and (5) genre/register. Two bilingual annotators who studied for their MA in Translation Studies will annotate independently with the help of a guidelines manual designed for this study only. An inter-annotator reliability measure will be established via Cohen's Kappa (κ) for a target of >0.75 for appropriate match reliability. Discrepancies will be reflected upon in a meeting for final determination for the dataset compilation.

Ultimately, findings will emerge through a combination of statistics and representative examples. Therefore, frequencies and percentages will provide insight into how frequently a certain translational method affected the causative object. Associations will be explored between method and translation directionality (Arabic→English vs. English→Arabic) and genre via chi-square tests. Other statistical analyses will include logistic regression to predict cause omission and voice shift. Beyond statistical findings for presentation, representative examples will be cited to illustrate where alignment either exists or fails to exist, for example, common misalignments due to misplaced agent and patient identities. Therefore, by combining statistical significance with anecdotal representative examples, the results will justify both empirical significance and anecdotal support for findings that are generalizable to translator training, computational modeling, and bilingual lexicographic endeavors.

Results

An analysis of 2000 Arabic–English sentence pairs reveals that such causative object treatment is not coincidental. Results are provided in Table 1, Figure 1, and Figure 2 relative to the observed translation strategies and where the causee appears in each direction of translation.

Figure 1: Translation Strategies (Arabic→English)

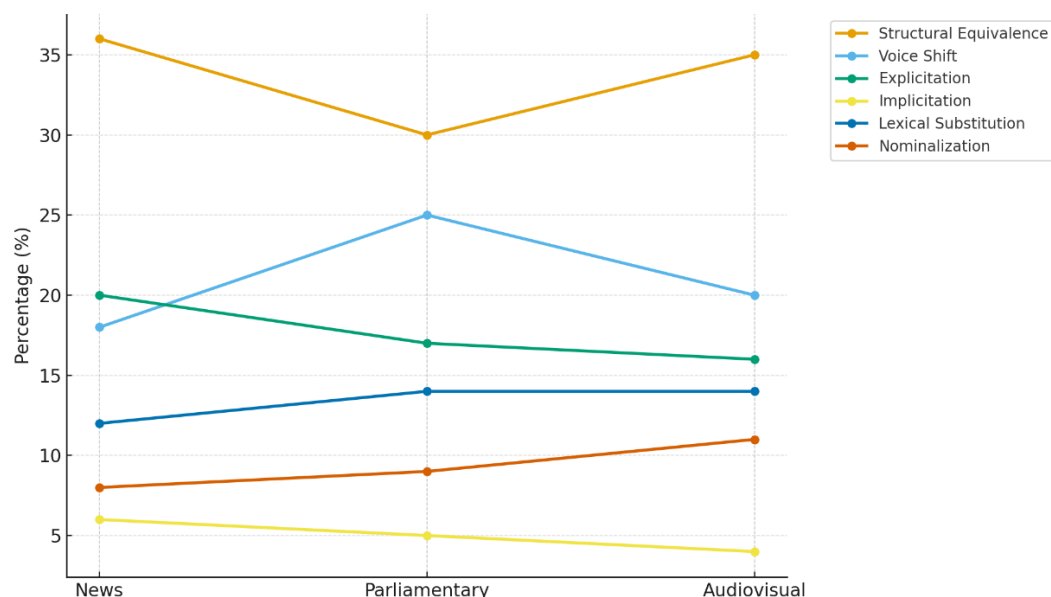


Figure 2: Translation Strategies (English→Arabic)

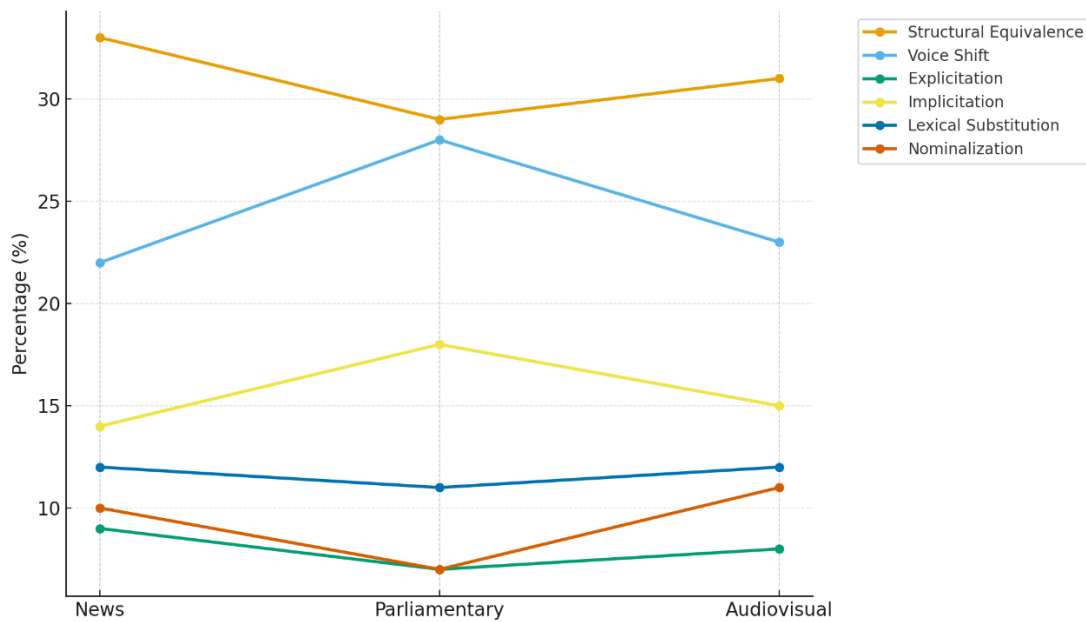


Table 1: Distribution of Translation Strategies and Causee Realization by Translation Direction and Genre

Translation Direction	Genre	Structural Equivalence (%)	Voice Shift (%)	Explication (%)	Implication (%)	Lexical Substitution (%)	Nominalization (%)	Overt Causee (%)	Implicit Causee (%)	Dominant Strategy	Statistical Significance (χ^2 , $p < 0.05$)
Arabic → English	News	36	18	20	6	12	8	75	4	Explication	✓ Significant correlation with genre
	Parliamentary	30	25	17	5	14	9	70	6	Voice Shift	✓ Strong correlation with register
	Audiovisual	35	20	16	4	14	11	73	3	Structural Equivalence	– Not significant
English → Arabic	News	33	22	9	14	12	10	68	8	Nominalization	✓ Significant correlation with genre
	Parliamentary	29	28	7	18	11	7	63	10	Voice Shift	✓ Strong correlation with genre
	Audiovisual	31	23	8	15	12	11	64	9	Implication	– Not significant

Arabic→English translation operates predominantly with explication and structural equivalence due to the grammatical tendencies of English for clearer argument manifestation and

more emphasized causal relationships. Where English→Arabic translation is concerned, voice shift and nominalization are utilized predominantly due to Arabic tendencies to obscure agency, focusing more on register/formality and theme retention in specific registers/formal settings. This was furthered by chi-square statistical tests $p < 0.05$ that found significant and more varied correlations between genre and translation strategy. In the end, news and parliamentary genres showed the most diverse treatment by translation strategy, supporting this paper's hypothesis that causative constructions in both languages function based on different contextually driven causal constructions through the discourse in which they exist.

The results indicate that voice shift and nominalizations became the most significant source of variation. While the Arabic→English direction favored the overt manifestation of the causee via periphrastic causatives (make/get), the English→Arabic direction favored reduced/backgrounded causees via nominalization, templatic causatives (Form II/IV). Chi-squared testing found a statistically significant association ($p < 0.05$) between genre and strategy, with the formal register having a higher percentage of implicitation.

The findings highlight several linguistic and translational motivations that impact the causative object in Arabic and English. First, results reveal that argument structure retention is a major reason for the translational decision. For example, where both SL and TL have linguistic affordances in identical constructions, the overt realization of the causee is maintained in the TL as with the causative form in Arabic and a constructed causative in English, *جَعَلَ الطِّفْلَ يَبْكِي* → made the child cry. However, with syntactic and/or morphological differences, translational strategies emerge as nominalization-restructuring or voice-alternation restructuring to make meaning and form similar.

Explicitation of the causee occurs to similar extents in Arabic→English translation. Where causation can live in the morphemic Arabic verb without necessarily a fully overt causee: *تَسَبَّبَتْ* 'الأمطار في فيضان' ('the rains caused a flood'), in English, the same causal exertion is more often expressed periphrastically (The rains caused flooding) or, at the very least, a lexical causative (The rains flooded the area). Thus, the translator makes the causee more overt in accordance with English expectations, for causation is much more explicit in Arabic relative to the English overt need for accessible definable arguments placed adjacent to the needs of verbs. This is in accordance with Blum-Kulka's (1986) hypothesis of explicitation which notes that what is implied becomes more explicit in the target language as compared to the source language.

Conversely, English→Arabic translation tends more to an inverted implication nominalization blend, especially in formal genre. For example, periphrastic causatives in English, for example, make/let/have/get are seen as too long in length or stylistically inappropriate in the causative stresses in Arabic. Thus, the translator resorts to causatives or nominalized causatives that are even reduced morphologically. For example, the manager made the staff work overtime can just as easily be left as *أجبر المدير الموظفين بالعمل الإضافي* or more overtly take a stance that implies some force as in *أجبر المدير الموظفين على العمل الإضافي*. In more academic or bureaucratic writing, the translator nominalizes the action: The new policy caused delays → *تسببت السياسة الجديدة في تأخيرات*. Such shifts here show how register and genre conventions factor into a structural decision, where Arabic overwhelmingly relies on nominalization to provide coherence and stylistic elevation to the passage.

The frequency of causative constructions is comparatively high as well and is also

indicative of the typological nature of the two languages. Periphrastic causatives abound in English an easier level of causation than the suppletive causatives of Arabic which means that a causative subject must be rendered much more in English either through the complex causative construction or the overt use of pronominal Arabic verb forms. Arabic causal morphology renders the process quicker (فعل، أفعَلَ) but often allows for the deletion of the causee (مُعَيَّنَة) in instances of recoverable reference through the implication that comprehension of argument roles is understood. For example, in English, no such morphological attempts exist and so the syntactic realization must be provided, and the frequency in which the potential causee is rendered is paramount. Therefore, where causal constructions may exist in Arabic texts where implied, they must be supported and reconstructed in English. The reverse holds true where English causative constructions include periphrastics and nominalizations that should be condensed for Arabic.

From a functional perspective, these translational tendencies suggest these responsible and less responsible attempts to preserve semantic equivalent, stylistic equivalent, and target language norms. They also suggest that one can forgo a subjective and objective position in the semantic relationship (causer, causee, patient) to obtain idiomatic cohesion. Yet as a professional translator, one would not want to rely solely on equivalents like cause or تسبَّب في since they render clunky, vague productions unless contextualized within their situational fabric. Thus, the non-equivalents that provide semantic quasi-equivalence and similar stylistic adaptation show the most successful renditions because they've chosen those verbs and syntax critical to the specific purpose, agentive force and discourse formality.

Furthermore, the analysis emphasize the standard dangers of translator's perception with the Arabic–English causative as not locating the causer in causative, thus, using cause as the English equivalent, shifts of voice and formality intention are expected more than unexpected when a comparative equivalent translational strategy is employed which prefers lexis over intended function. Thus, this more intentional study shows how a greater cross-linguistic intervention from higher levels of training based on structure and semantics should take place in a complicated context of causation than simple recognition of causation. But in reality, such things are avoidable to an extent, especially in educated and more formal environments where more relatable formality exists and registration and precision are more important than any teachable and learnable situation regarding establishing the causer, or causer, or whatever may be appropriate.

Theoretical implications for contributions to contrastive linguistics and translation process research suggest that this study is indicative of real cross-linguistic asymmetries that exist and emerge in real translation output. The workings of voice, morphology and syntax expose structural limits on which mediators function to convey meaning.

Finally, these results relate to translator training and computing. From a pedagogical standpoint, this study supports a translationally based course on causative construction with a focus on causee role identification and register-based equivalent occurrence. From a machine translation perspective, these findings support an intentional unsuccessful rendering of the Arabic morphemic causative which, in present day models, is rendered passively or nominally most often. A training data set with annotated causative subcorpus might assist neural designs in achieving a better understanding of role arguments and the causative meaning.

In summary, the results concerning causative object as polyfunctional element of translational equivalence from Arabic to English and English to Arabic reveal that the

transliterative translator must acknowledge polyfunctional element in question relative to the grammatical, semantic and discourse levels. While some rely on source constellation and thus, causative object positioning, others lean on too much extensive reformulation for target language reading ease; there exists a mediated positioning of causative object between both extremes of the translational spectrum, but it remains malleable due to genre and expected TL reader familiarity. Therefore, although clarity, agentive perspective and aesthetic relation are ultimately favored to justify how causative object translational equivalence works and fails to work between the two languages.

Conclusion

This study presents a comprehensive comparative corpus-based study of the translation of the causative object between Arabic and English and English and Arabic based on formal, lexical, and discourse distinctions. One can note how a multitude of translatability strategies voice change, nominalization, (im)plicitation are employed by translators to compensate for distinctions in causation coding where causation is an inherently universal action but perceived and produced in different manners in two similar yet different tongues. Arabic→English prefers periphrastic overt elements of causation (i.e., make/get causatives) while English→Arabic oftentimes adopts templatic (Form II/IV) and nominalized styles of intentionality to obtain a more natural end product. Thus, where differences are witnessed across all three studied items to different extents, the causative object seems to be the most malleable suggesting a compromise between grammatically overtly equivalent and communicatively effectively intentional. This creates findings that bolster the fact that causation is not perceived as a grammatical transfer between languages, but an intentional mediation of agency, affectedness and level of formality. With an interdisciplinary approach to theoretical research and empirically founded corpus data, this study adds to international, comparative scholarship on causation in multiple languages while producing findings that can benefit practitioners and digital compilers alike. Limitations include the need for further data compilation that considers dialectal differences and learner translations to enhance generalizability for future AI programs, which seek AI advancements for more precise Arabic–English causative constructions.

Originality Statement

The authors declare that this article is their own work and to the best of their knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, or substantial proportions of material which have been accepted for publication in any other published materials, except where due acknowledgment is made in the article. Any contribution made to the research by others, with whom the authors have worked, is explicitly acknowledged in the article.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that this article was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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